



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## ONE OF ICE'S TOP DRUG MONEY LAUNDERING TARGETS NABBED IN COLOMBIA

*-- State Department Offered Up To \$5 Million For Capture of Florez-Rios and 4 Others --*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Michael J. Garcia, the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced that one of ICE's top drug trafficking and money laundering fugitives was arrested earlier today in Colombia.

Colombian authorities, working with agents from the ICE Attaché Office in Bogotá, captured **Jose Dagoberto Florez-Rios, a.k.a "Chuma"** (born on March 24, 1957) on a farm outside Medellin this morning. Florez-Rios is considered one of the key members of Colombia's Norte Valle Cartel (NVC) and is one of ICE's most wanted drug fugitives. Earlier this year, the U.S. State Department offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest of Florez-Rios and four other fugitives connected to this case.

"Dagoberto Florez-Rios is one of ICE's top drug money laundering fugitives and his arrest today is yet another example of the unprecedented law enforcement cooperation between the United States and Colombia. The arrest also demonstrates the value of pursuing the money trail in drug investigations. This ICE investigation began with a raid on three, small money transfer businesses in Queens. Ultimately, it led to the highest levels of Colombia's Norte Valle Cartel," said Michael J. Garcia, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Florez-Rios is charged in a March 2004 federal indictment in the Eastern District of New York with drug and money laundering violations. He is described in the indictment as the second-in command to Arcangel de Jesus Henao-Montoya, a senior leader of the Norte Valle Cartel who was arrested earlier this year and is currently in custody in New York. Florez-Rios is a member of the Henao-Montoya family by marriage.

Indictments out of the Eastern District of New York in 2003 and 2004 describe the Norte Valle Cartel as Colombia's largest and most feared drug organization. Between 1990 and the present, the cartel allegedly exported more than 1.2 million pounds of cocaine worth more than \$10 billion to the U.S. The cartel is currently believed to be responsible for between 30 and 50 percent of the cocaine entering the United States.

The Eastern District of New York indictments and today's arrest resulted from a lengthy probe of Colombia's Norte Valle Cartel that began in the mid-1990s. The investigation was conducted by the El Dorado Task Force, an ICE-led anti-money laundering task force in New York, as well as by ICE agents in Colombia and Colombian authorities.

The ICE investigation initially focused on small, storefront money remitter businesses in Queens, New York. ICE agents determined that three of these businesses were owned by an individual who was the Norte Valle Cartel's chief drug distributor in New York. This person was responsible for distributing thousands of kilograms of cocaine, laundering more than \$70 million, and ordering multiple murders. The individual was arrested by ICE agents, convicted, and in May 2002, sentenced to life in prison.

The ICE investigation continued, revealing the structure of the Norte Valle Cartel and leading to charges in Eastern District of New York against its key leaders. The indictments charged Luis Hernando Gomez - Bustamante, a.k.a. "Rasguno," with operating a Continuing Criminal Enterprise in connection with his leadership role in the cartel. Another accused leader of the cartel, Arcangel de Jesus Henao-Montoya, was charged with drug and money laundering violations. Dagoberto Florez-Rios was charged with drug and money laundering violations. Several others were charged as well.

On January 15, 2004, Henao-Montoya was captured in Panama and expelled by Panamanian authorities into ICE custody in New York. Henao-Montoya faces a maximum sentence of life in prison if convicted. He remains in custody in New York.

On July 2, 2004, Gomez-Bustamante was detained by Cuban authorities in Cuba after entering on a false passport. He is believed to remain in Cuban custody.

#ICE#

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.*